

Message Text

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ACTION A-01

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2529

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FOR A - JOHN THOMAS AND EUR - GEORGE VEST

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OVIP PL (CARTER, JIMMY) PINT
SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT - INTERPRETERS

REF: (A) WARSAW 9161 (B) STATE 303280

1. SUMMARY. I AM SURE THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE OF THE EMBARRAS-
MENTS WE EXPERIENCED WITH INTERPRETERS DURING THE PRESIDENT'S
VISIT. THE SUCCESS OF THE VISIT OTHERWISE SHOULD NOT DETER US
FROM DRAWING THE APPROPRIATE LESSON. THERE WILL BE A VISIT TO THE
U.S., PERHAPS LATER THIS YEAR, BY FIRST SECRETARY GIEREK. THE
NEXT TIME AROUND, WE MAY NOT BE SO FORTUNATE IN ESCAPING DAMAGE
CAUSED BY AN INCORRECT CHOICE OF OFFICIAL INTERPRETER. END
SUMMARY.

2. THE DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT I EXPRESSED MY CONCERN ABOUT
THIS PROBLEM (REF A). I PROPOSED A CANDIDATE, ALEX WIECHOWSKI,
IN WHOM I HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE. IN DECLINING TO ACCEPT THIS
RECOMMENDATION FOR SECURITY REASONS, THE DEPARTMENT ASSURED ME
THAT STEVEN SEYMOUR WAS A HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND COMPETENT
PROFESSIONAL (REF B).

3. AFTER THE INADEQUATE PERFORMANCE OF MR. SEYMOUR DURING THE
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ARRIVAL CEREMONIES, MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PARTY, THE ADVANCE
TEAM, AND EMBASSY OFFICERS WERE APPROACHED BY NUMEROUS POLES AND
OTHER FOREIGNERS ASKING WHY WE HAD SELECTED HIM AS INTERPRETER.
THE QUESTIONS OFTEN TOOK THE FORM, "WHY CANNOT YOU AMERICANS FIND
A QUALIFIED POLISH INTERPRETER AMONG THOSE MILLIONS OF POLISH-
AMERICANS ABOUT WHOM YOU TALK?"

4. I RECEIVED THIS MORNING A LETTER, IN EXCELLENT ENGLISH, FROM A GENTLEMAN WHO WRITES TO "PROTEST AGAINST THE CONTEMPT SHOWN TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES BY THE OFFICIAL INTERPRETER" (IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THE WRITER REALIZES THE INTERPRETER WAS BEING PAID BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT). MY CORRESPONDENT CONTINUES, "THE INTERPRETER SPOKE IN UNGRAMMATICAL POLISH, USED WRONG WORDS AND MUTILATED SOME BEYOND RECOGNITION, STRIPPING IN EFFECT THE SPEECH OF ITS SERIOUS SINCERITY AND NATURAL DIGNITY. SINCE THE SPEECH WAS MEANT FOR US, THE CITIZENS OF POLAND, I CANNOT HELP FEELING OFFENDED AND HURT BY THIS CONTEMPTUOUS IF UNDESIGNED NEGLECT OF THE NATURAL CIVILITIES, AND BY THIS REGRETTABLE DISRESPECT TO THE PRESIDENT AS WELL."

5. FOLLOWING SEYMOUR'S AIRPORT PERFORMANCE, BARRY JAGODA OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS OFFICE ASKED AN EMBASSY OFFICER TO RECOMMEND A REPLACEMENT FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DECEMBER 30 PRESS CONFERENCE. JERZY KRYCKI, A FORMER PART-TIME POLISH TEACHER IN THE EMBASSY'S LANGUAGE PROGRAM (NOT "AN EMPLOYEE OF THE EMBASSY," AS ONE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE PUT IT), WAS RECOMMENDED. KRYCKI PERFORMED WELL DURING THE CONFERENCE, WHERE THE PRESSURE WAS LESS INTENSE AND THE EXPOSURE LESS OBVIOUS THAN DURING THE STATE DINNER (DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE KRYCKI WAS IN A BOOTH). ON THE BASIS OF THIS PERFORMANCE AND WITHOUT CONSULTING ANYONE IN THE EMBASSY, JAGODA ASKED KRYCKI TO INTERPRET THE PRESIDENT'S TOAST AT THE STATE DINNER. FROM THE PRESIDENT'S FIRST WORDS, KRYCKI WAS HOPELESSLY AT SEA AND HAD TO BE RELIEVED EARLY ON BY FIRST SECRETARY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GIEREK'S INTERPRETER, HENRYK SOKALSKI. SOKALSKI RESCUED THE OCCASION VERY COMPETENTLY.

6. TO BE SURE, THERE WERE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES IN BOTH CASES. MR. SEYMOUR WAS HANDED THE PRESIDENT'S ARRIVAL STATEMENT ONLY MINUTES BEFORE IT WAS TO BE DELIVERED AND WAS REQUIRED TO SIGHT-TRANSLATE WITHOUT TIME FOR PREPARATION. THE COLD, WINDY, DECEMBER WEATHER DID NOT HELP. KRYCKI ALSO WAS GIVEN WHAT HE WAS TOLD WAS THE TEXT OF THE PRESIDENT'S TOAST SHORTLY BEFORE IT WAS DELIVERED. THE PRESIDENT DEPARTED EXTENSIVELY FROM THIS TEXT, AS IS HIS WONT, AND KRYCKI SAID THAT, MOREOVER, HE HAD GREAT DIFFICULTY HEARING AND UNDERSTANDING THE PRESIDENT (HE WAS STANDING BEHIND HIM). THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HAVE REPRESENTED A SEVERE TEST OF AN EXPERIENCED INTERPRETER. IN THIS CASE, HOWEVER, IT SEEMED CLEAR, NEITHER MAN COULD BE CALLED AN EXPERIENCED POLISH-LANGUAGE INTERPRETER.

7. SO FAR AS I KNOW, THE PRESIDENT WAS NOT UNDULY DISTURBED BY THESE EVENTS. DR. BRZEZINSKI WAS UPSET BY SEYMOUR'S AIRPORT PERFORMANCE AND BY KRYCKI'S FAILURE, BUT HIS UNHAPPINESS WAS ASSUAGED BY THE SUCCESS OF THE VISIT AS A WHOLE. NEITHER MAY BE SO UNDERSTANDING THE NEXT TIME.

8. MR OBJECTED BY CYRIL MUROMCEW BECAUSE HIS NATIVE LANGUAGE IS RUSSIAN. HE SPEAKS FLUENT POLISH, BUT, INEVITABLY, WHEN HE CANNOT FIND THE RIGHT POLISH WORDS, HE ADAPTS A RUSSIAN ONE. THIS IS NATURAL AND UNOBJECTIONABLE IN NEGOTIATION (I DO IT MYSELF A LOT), BUT NOT WHEN THE TRANSLATION IS GOING OUT ON THE AIR TO MILLIONS OF POLES, WHO, TO PUT IT MILDLY, DO NOT LIKE RUSSIANS OR THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE. IT WAS THEREFORE SOMETHING OF A BLOW TO FIND THAT STEVEN SEYMOUR IS ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS INCLINED TO SPEAK RUSSIFIED POLISH THAN MR. MUROMCEW.

9. I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR A SECURITY CLEARANCE FOR AN INTERPRETER. OFFICIAL SPEECHES AND TOASTS ARE DESIGNED TO BE PUBLISHED. EVEN IN A TETE-A-TETE CONVERSATION, THE OTHER SIDE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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KNOWS PERFECTLY WELL WHAT HAS BEEN SAID. OF COURSE, THE INTERPRETER SHOULD BE RELIABLE AND DISCREET. THAT WAS THE POINT OF MY PERSONAL ENDORSEMENT OF ALEX WIECHOWSKI.

10. LOOKING FORWARD TO FIRST SECRETARY GIEREK'S RETURN VISIT, I HOPE THE DEPARTMENT WILL BE ABLE TO FIND AN AMERICAN CITIZEN WHO CAN DO THIS JOB SATISFACTORILY. MAY I SUGGEST THAT NO ONE BE ACCEPTED ON THE SAY-SO OF ANYONE WHO IS NOT A NATIVE POLISH SPEAKER? THE POLISH SERVICE OF VOA SHOULD BE ASKED TO RATE CANDIDATES. I WOULD EVEN SEE IF DR. BRZEZINSKI CANNOT FIND TIME TO PASS ON THE FINALISTS. IF A QUALIFIED AMERICAN CANNOT BE FOUND, I AGAIN SUGGEST THAT, AT LEAST FOR CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS, WHEN NO QUESTION OF SECURITY CAN BE INVOLVED, VERY SERIOUS CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO USING ALEX WIECHOWSKI, WHO IS THE ONLY OTHER PERSON I HAVE KNOWN DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS WHO CAN BE RANKED WITH HENRYK SOKALSKI AS AN INTERPRETER BETWEEN POLISH AND ENGLISH.

11. THE ADVICE GIVEN IN REF B, THAT A POLISH-LANGUAGE-QUALIFIED OFFICER ACCOMPANY THE U.S. DELEGATION AS A NOTETAKER, WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL IF PARTICIPATION IN THE CARTER-GIEREK TETE-A-TETE HAD NOT BEEN LIMITED TO FOUR PERSONS: THE TWO PRINCIPALS PLUS THEIR TWO INTERPRETERS. WHEN I ASKED MR. SEYMOUR AFTER THIS MEETING WHETHER HE WOULD PREPARE A WRITTEN REPORT OF WHAT HAD BEEN SAID, HE REPLIED THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN TOLD TO TAKE NOTES, HAD CONSEQUENTLY TAKEN NONE, AND HENCE COULD NOT WRITE A REPORT. IT SHOULD, I THINK, BE A CONDITION OF EMPLOYMENT OF INTERPRETERS THAT THEY NOT ONLY TAKE COMPLETE NOTES ON SUCH OCCASIONS, BUT BE PREPARED, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTERWARDS, TO TRANSCRIBE THESE NOTES FULLY.

DAVIES

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